Divine Promises and Human Actions: Navigating the Ethical Landscape of Israel's Return to the Holy Land

Douglas C. Youvan

doug@youvan.com

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The intricate narrative of Israel's return to the Holy Land is one layered with divine promises, historical movements, and human actions. While scriptures unequivocally endorse the Jewish return, they also emphasize peace, prosperity, and coexistence. The subsequent establishment of the State of Israel and the conflicts that ensued present a complex panorama where divine decrees meet human geopolitics. This paper seeks to explore this intersection, shedding light on the divine sanction of the Jewish return and juxtaposing it against the human actions that followed, particularly in relation to Israel's neighbors. It delves into the ethical teachings of Judaism, urging for a path that harmonizes divine intent with ethical treatment of all inhabitants.

Keywords: divine promises, Jewish return, Holy Land, State of Israel, geopolitics, biblical endorsement, ethical teachings, Judaism, coexistence, Israeli-Palestinian relationship, Middle Eastern conflicts, scriptures, peace, justice, restoration.

1. Introduction

The intricate relationship between divine promises and human history stands as a fundamental intersection in the study of Israel and its evolving geopolitical context. Central to the discourse surrounding modern Israel is the profound question of reconciling the divine mandate as expressed in scripture with the subsequent actions undertaken in the name of this mandate. This juncture forms the crux of our exploration.

The foundational premise of our exploration is predicated on the **divine sanction for the Jewish return to the Holy Land**. The scriptures, particularly within the context of the New International Version (NIV), offer a compelling tapestry of prophecies and promises that allude to a time when the Jewish diaspora would be beckoned back to their ancestral homeland. Notably, Deuteronomy 30:3-5 states, "*Then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you.*" This divine decree is seen as a spiritual and historical anchor, signifying a divinely orchestrated return. Yet, the interpretation of such verses becomes paramount. Do they signify a peaceful repatriation to a land left fallow or something more assertive and complex?

This leads us to the counterpoint of our discourse, which revolves around the **human actions that followed** the Zionist call for return. Historically, the Zionist movement, which emerged in the late 19th century, emphasized the need for a Jewish homeland in response to centuries of persecution. Yet, while its inception may have been influenced by religious prophecies, its execution was undeniably political and strategic. The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 marked the zenith of the Zionist movement, but it also heralded the onset of a series of geopolitical challenges, wars, and ethical dilemmas. The subsequent military campaigns and administrative decisions, executed in the name of security or

territorial integrity, have frequently been a topic of intense scrutiny, both within theological and military circles.

An important distinction then emerges. While the biblical narrative seems to condone, if not champion, the return of the Jews to their ancestral lands, does it equally sanction the political and military decisions made in the years following 1948? This distinction is not trivial, for it engages with the very ethos of religious interpretation and its application in real-world scenarios.

Therefore, our journey will traverse the annals of scripture, the bylanes of history, and the corridors of strategy, attempting to discern where the divine ends and the human commences. By doing so, we seek to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of the divine mandate in the modern geopolitics of Israel and its neighbors. This exploration acknowledges the unresolved tensions that still persist in the region. In not aiming for a conclusory note of hope, we remain cognizant of the present realities, while emphasizing the profundity of the scriptural and historical roots that have shaped them.

2. Historical Background of Zionism and the Return

The story of modern Israel is intricately woven with the ideological fabric of Zionism. To understand the current landscape and the theological discussions surrounding Israel's establishment, it is imperative to delve deep into the birth and maturation of the Zionist movement.

Zionism's Origins and Goals:

The late 19th and early 20th centuries marked significant shifts in the Jewish diasporic experience. Rising anti-Semitic sentiments, particularly in Eastern Europe and Russia, rendered Jewish populations vulnerable to pogroms and systemic discrimination. It

was against this tumultuous backdrop that Zionism began to take root, driven by a blend of religious fervor, nationalist aspirations, and the dire pragmatics of survival. The term "Zionism" itself is derived from "Zion", a biblical term referring to Jerusalem, reflecting the spiritual dimension of the movement.

At its core, Zionism advocated for the establishment of a national homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine. Theodor Herzl, often touted as the father of modern political Zionism, emphasized this in his seminal work, "Der Judenstaat" (The Jewish State), where he envisioned a secular state for Jews, free from the persecutions they endured in Europe. Yet, alongside this secular vision, there was also a strong religious strand of Zionism, grounded in the biblical prophecies and the age-old Jewish connection to the Land of Israel. For these religious Zionists, the return was seen not just as a political necessity, but as a fulfillment of divine prophecy.

The Establishment of the State of Israel and the Initial Return:

The Balfour Declaration of 1917 by the British government, expressing support for the establishment of a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine, provided a significant political impetus for the Zionist cause. However, it wasn't until the aftermath of World War II and the horrors of the Holocaust that the urgency for a Jewish homeland gained global sympathy and momentum.

In 1947, the United Nations approved a partition plan dividing British Mandate Palestine into Jewish and Arab states, with Jerusalem as an international city. While the Jewish leadership accepted this plan, it was rejected by the Arab states. Consequently, when the British Mandate ended on May 14, 1948, David Ben-Gurion proclaimed the establishment of the State of Israel. Almost immediately, the newborn state was attacked by neighboring Arab countries, leading to the 1948 Arab-Israeli war.

Despite being outnumbered, Israel not only survived but expanded its territory beyond the UN partition plan.

Simultaneous with these geopolitical events was the unprecedented return of Jewish communities from across the globe. From Holocaust survivors in Europe to Jews from Arab countries facing retaliatory persecution, there was a significant influx into the nascent state. This "aliyah" or ascent, as the immigration to Israel is termed, was seen by many as the materialization of the scriptural promises of return, especially verses like Isaiah 43:5-6, "*Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west.*"

In charting this historical trajectory, we see a dynamic interplay of religious conviction, political strategy, and historical contingencies. The establishment of Israel and the initial return were products not just of biblical prophecies but also of specific historical circumstances that lent urgency and legitimacy to the Zionist cause.

3. Deuteronomy's Divine Promise (Deuteronomy 30:3-5, NIV)

The Book of Deuteronomy, as the concluding tome of the Torah, holds a unique place in the Jewish canon. It serves not only as a recapitulation of the laws and events detailed in the preceding books but also as Moses' final exhortations to the Israelites before they enter the Promised Land. Among its verses, Deuteronomy 30:3-5 stands out as a poignant promise, echoing the covenantal relationship between God and His chosen people.

"*Then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you. Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the Lord your*

God will gather you and bring you back. He will bring you to the land that belonged to your ancestors, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your ancestors."

Analysis of God's Promise to Gather the Jews from All Nations:

This passage holds multiple layers of significance. Firstly, it acknowledges a diasporic reality, where the Israelites would be scattered "to the most distant land under the heavens." Historically, the Jewish diaspora has been a recurring theme, from the Babylonian exile to the Roman dispersal, and more recently, the vast migrations caused by anti-Semitic pogroms and the Holocaust. Against this backdrop of dispersion, the Deuteronomic promise serves as a beacon of hope, assuring a divinely orchestrated gathering.

The phraseology of God "having compassion" and "restoring fortunes" speaks volumes. It not only hints at the hardships endured by the Jewish people but also underscores the benevolent nature of the divine intent behind their eventual gathering. In essence, the return is not merely a geopolitical realignment but a redemptive act, a restoration of a covenantal relationship that had been strained by historical circumstances.

Emphasis on the Peaceful and Prosperous Nature of the Return:

The return, as envisioned in this passage, is distinctly characterized by peace and prosperity. The Israelites are not merely promised their ancestral land, but they are also assured an existence that surpasses the blessings experienced by their forefathers. The mention of taking "possession" of the land can be construed as a peaceful reclamation, devoid of conflict or usurpation. Moreover, the divine pledge to make them "more prosperous and numerous" underscores the benevolent

outcomes of the return – it isn't about mere survival or establishing a foothold but thriving in the fullest sense.

This Deuteronomic promise, while embedded in ancient scripture, resonates profoundly with the contemporary discourse on Israel. The promise of return, replete with blessings, offers theological ammunition for those championing the Zionist cause. However, the peaceful and prosperous nature of the envisioned return also serves as a benchmark, a divine ideal against which the real-world unfolding of events can be juxtaposed and analyzed.

4. Isaiah and the Universal Gathering (Isaiah 43:5-6, NIV)

The Book of Isaiah is replete with themes of redemption, restoration, and God's unyielding commitment to His chosen people. Within its vast expanse, Isaiah 43:5-6 emerges as a particularly striking passage that underlines God's global orchestration to assemble the Jewish diaspora.

"*Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth.*"

God's Decree to Assemble Jews from Every Corner of the World:

The imagery evoked in these verses paints a panoramic vista of a divine gathering on an unprecedented scale. The cardinal directions—east, west, north, and south—are invoked not just as geographical markers but as metaphors for the vastness and diversity of the Jewish dispersion. In a sense, this promise transcends the historical circumstances of Isaiah's time and seems almost prophetic of the extensive Jewish diaspora that would scatter across continents in subsequent millennia.

The declarative tone, where God states unequivocally His intent to "bring" and "gather," underscores the agency and purposefulness of this divine initiative. This is not a passive hope or a mere aspiration but a definitive action plan. Moreover, the invocation of "my sons" and "my daughters" lends a deeply personal and paternal tone to the promise. It reflects God's intimate relationship with the Jewish people, His protective and restorative love that seeks to unify a fragmented familial entity.

The Emphasis on Gathering without Conflict:
One of the salient features of this Isaianic vision is the peaceful nature of the gathering. There are no undertones of conquest, warfare, or strife. Instead, the narrative is one of unimpeded return. The verses convey a scenario where external entities (possibly representative of nations or powers) willingly release the Jewish diaspora. When God commands the north to "Give them up!" and the south not to "hold them back," it suggests a divine authority that faces no resistance or conflict in its execution.

This pacifistic tone contrasts starkly with much of the tumultuous history that Israel and the Jewish people have faced. The envisioned gathering is harmonious, ordered, and conflict-free, an ideal that has proven elusive in the actual geopolitics of the Middle East.

Drawing from Isaiah's verses, the theological foundation for a divinely sanctioned return is evident. Yet, as with Deuteronomy, the nature of this return—as peaceful and unopposed—serves as a significant point of reflection when juxtaposed against the contemporary realities of Israel's establishment and its subsequent interactions with neighboring entities. The promise and the ideal, as articulated in Isaiah, prompt deeper contemplation on the alignment (or misalignment) between divine vision and human realization.

5. Jeremiah's Assurance of Return without Harm (Jeremiah 29:10-14, NIV)

Jeremiah, the "weeping prophet", navigated a tumultuous period in Jewish history, witnessing the fall of Jerusalem and the commencement of the Babylonian exile. Amidst this backdrop of despair, Jeremiah's prophecies often carried dual messages: immediate warnings and rebukes interwoven with long-term promises of hope and restoration. A poignant representation of this hopeful vision is found in Jeremiah 29:10-14:

"*This is what the Lord says: 'When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,' declares the Lord, 'and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,' declares the Lord, 'and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.'*"

The Projected Timeline and Positive Future in the Holy Land:
The prophecy begins with a clear temporal marker: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon." This specificity speaks to the historicity of the prediction. It's not an indefinite future, but a defined period after which restoration would commence. This timeline offered the exiles a perspective – their exile, though harsh, was a temporary phase in the grand arc of their history.

Beyond the timeline, the promise that unfolds is profoundly optimistic. God's affirmation, "*For I know the plans I have for you*," is a powerful reassurance of His providence. The subsequent descriptors – plans to "prosper," to not "harm," to offer "hope" and

a "future" – paint a picture of a benevolent God deeply invested in the well-being of His people. This future in the Holy Land, as envisioned by Jeremiah, is not one of mere subsistence or survival but of flourishing and thriving.

No Indication of Divine Sanction for Subsequent Conflict: Significantly, in this vista of return and restoration, there's a glaring absence of any divine endorsement for conflict, war, or conquest. The returnees are painted as seekers of God, engaging in prayer and genuine spiritual pursuit. The emphasis is on a renewed relationship with the Divine, symbolized by the phrases: "you will call on me," "you will seek me," and "I will be found by you."

In the process of this return from "all the nations and places where I have banished you," the narrative conspicuously lacks any divine mandate for aggression or expansionism. The return is framed as a peaceful reintegration into a place that historically and spiritually belonged to them, devoid of any divine commandment to engage in battles or skirmishes with neighboring entities.

Drawing from Jeremiah’s prophecies, the theological underpinning for Israel's establishment in its ancestral homeland is clear. However, the nature of this restoration, as portrayed by the prophet, raises significant contemplative questions. If the return was prophesied to be harmonious and spiritually profound, where does the subsequent history of conflict, as witnessed in the broader Israeli-Arab dynamics, fit in the divine scheme? This disjunction between Jeremiah's pacific vision and the tumultuous reality forces scholars and believers alike to grapple with complex questions of interpretation, divine will, and human agency.

6. Ezekiel’s Focus on Restoration (Ezekiel 36:24, NIV)

Ezekiel, a prophet and priest, operated within the same gloomy historical context as Jeremiah, addressing the Jewish exiles in Babylon. His visions, often vivid and symbolic, elucidated a grand plan of God for the eventual restoration of Israel. Central to this theme is Ezekiel 36:24:

"*For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land.*"

The Divine Commitment to Place Jews in Their Land:
Ezekiel's words here are direct and unambiguous. There is a resolute commitment expressed by God to execute this act of re-gathering. The verbs "take" and "gather" are indicators of an active, deliberate Divine intent, highlighting God's role as the chief orchestrator of this grand return. This isn't a passive or reactive move; it is a proactive divine initiative.

Ezekiel’s portrayal further amplifies the idea of a personal God, deeply concerned about His people. The phrase "your own land" is a poignant reminder of the ancestral and spiritual bond the Jewish people have with the land of Israel. This isn't just any land, but their land, a place of historical significance, religious importance, and divine promise. The act of returning them to this land is a powerful symbol of God fulfilling His covenants, demonstrating His steadfastness, and rectifying the historical injustices and displacements faced by the Jewish people.

The Clear Distinction between Return and Conquest:
Ezekiel's description of the return in this verse is notably devoid of martial undertones. There's no mention of battles, no insinuations of conquests, and no directives for warfare. The emphasis is squarely on the act of restoration. This is about God's redemptive plan, His endeavor to correct a historical displacement and restore His people to their divinely promised habitat.

The distinction between a peaceful return and a militaristic conquest is significant, especially when viewed in the context of subsequent historical and political developments in the region. While the divine mandate for restoration is clear, there's an absence of a divine decree endorsing conflict or territorial expansion through force.

This particular facet of Ezekiel's prophecy serves as a pivotal point of theological reflection. If the envisioned return was to be an act of harmonious restoration, how do the subsequent wars and territorial disputes, which characterized much of Israel's modern history, align with this divine vision? Ezekiel's emphasis on peaceful reintegration, juxtaposed against the realities of regional geopolitics, offers a platform for profound discussions on divine intent, human interpretation, and the challenges of actualizing scriptural promises in a complex, multipolar world.

7. The 1948 Arab-Israeli War and Its Implications

The 1948 Arab-Israeli War, often referred to as the War of Independence by Israelis and the Nakba (Catastrophe) by Palestinians, represents a monumental event in the chronicles of the Middle East. The war ensued following the declaration of the establishment of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948. This conflict and its aftermath have been scrutinized not only for their political and territorial implications but also for their theological dimensions, especially in the context of the biblical promises regarding the return of the Jews to the Holy Land.

Overview of the Circumstances Leading to the Conflict:

The seeds of the 1948 conflict can be traced back to various historical, political, and socio-cultural developments. The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw the rise of Zionism, a nationalist movement advocating for the return of the Jewish people to their

ancestral homeland. This ideological wave, coupled with the Balfour Declaration of 1917 in which Britain expressed its support for a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine, set the stage for increased Jewish immigration to the region.

However, Palestine, under the British Mandate, was also home to a significant Arab population. The increasing Jewish settlements and the competing nationalisms of Jews and Arabs in the same territory led to tensions, clashes, and uprisings. These complexities were exacerbated by the aftermath of World War II, with the horrors of the Holocaust driving international sympathy and support for the establishment of a Jewish state.

The United Nations, in an effort to address the conflicting national aspirations of Jews and Arabs, proposed the Partition Plan in 1947, suggesting the division of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states, with Jerusalem as an internationalized city. While Jewish leadership accepted the proposal, it was rejected by the Arab states and the Palestinian leadership. This rejection, followed by Israel's declaration of statehood in May 1948, led to the intervention of neighboring Arab countries and the onset of the war.

Assessment of Its Outcomes in Light of Biblical Principles:
The 1948 war, with its varied military operations, strategic maneuvers, and political implications, resulted in an Israeli victory. But when evaluated through a biblical lens, the events take on additional layers of complexity.

The establishment of Israel can be seen as a fulfillment of the biblical prophecies, especially those articulated by prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, emphasizing the return of Jews to their ancestral homeland. From this perspective, the establishment of Israel and its subsequent defense against

opposing forces can be interpreted as being within the divine plan.

However, the biblical narrative, especially in the prophetic texts cited earlier, consistently underscores peaceful restoration, without endorsing conquest or conflict. The human tragedies, notably the Palestinian Nakba with the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Arab residents, appear misaligned with the harmonious return envisioned by the prophets. The strife, loss, and suffering experienced by many during and after the war do not find a clear parallel in the promises of a prosperous and peaceful restoration in the scriptures.

Moreover, while the Bible speaks of Israel's divine right to the land, it also contains numerous injunctions emphasizing justice, compassion, and the humane treatment of others, including "strangers" or non-Israelites (e.g., Leviticus 19:33-34). The challenges faced by Palestinian communities, both during and post-1948, when viewed in the light of these principles, present profound theological and ethical dilemmas.

In essence, while the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and the establishment of the State of Israel resonate with certain biblical prophecies regarding the return, they also elicit complex questions about the juxtaposition of divine promises and human actions, especially when those actions result in suffering and displacement for others. This interplay between scripture, history, and contemporary politics demands nuanced, empathetic, and informed discussions.

8. The Six-Day War and the Expansion of Territories

The Six-Day War, which erupted in June 1967, stands as one of the most rapid and transformative conflicts in modern history.

Spanning just six days, as the name suggests, the war saw Israel achieve a decisive victory over the combined forces of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, and in the process, significantly expand its territorial holdings. Yet, beyond the strategic and geopolitical implications, the war and its outcomes instigated profound ethical and theological debates, especially in relation to the biblical narratives about the Holy Land.

An Examination of the Causes and Results of the 1967 Conflict:

The roots of the Six-Day War are deeply entrenched in the regional dynamics of the Middle East post-1948. The aftermath of the 1948 War left the Arab states humiliated and led to a growing sentiment for the recovery of lost territories and the assertion of Arab dignity. On the Israeli side, security concerns dominated the national psyche, especially given the recurring skirmishes on the borders and an ever-present existential threat.

Several factors in early 1967 precipitated the conflict: an escalation in cross-border guerrilla attacks, false Soviet intelligence reports about Israeli intentions, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's decision to close the Straits of Tiran to Israeli ships, and the subsequent amassing of Egyptian troops in the Sinai Peninsula. Perceiving a coalition of Arab states gearing up for war, Israel launched a pre-emptive strike on June 5, 1967, aiming to neutralize the perceived threat.

Within six days, Israel had captured the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria. The swiftness and extent of the Israeli victory reshaped the geopolitics of the Middle East and changed the territorial contours of the Israeli state.

The Ethical Questions Raised Regarding the Annexation of Territories:

With Israel's territorial expansion following the Six-Day War came a plethora of ethical dilemmas and theological questions. Foremost among these is the matter of occupation. The territories seized in the war were populated predominantly by Palestinian Arabs in the West Bank and by Syrians in the Golan Heights. The implications of this for the residents of these territories, including issues of civil rights, self-determination, and day-to-day life under occupation, have been sources of intense debate.

From a theological standpoint, the capture of certain territories, especially East Jerusalem with its religious sites, was seen by some religious Zionists as a divine providence, a continuation of the miraculous return to the promised land. The idea that these regions, historically significant in biblical narratives, were now under Jewish control resonated with certain interpretations of biblical prophecies.

However, the ethical challenges posed by the occupation were substantial. While scriptures emphasize the special relationship between God, the Jewish people, and the land of Israel, they also stress themes of justice, kindness, and compassion. The biblical mandate to love one's neighbor (Leviticus 19:18) and the admonition to treat the stranger equitably (Exodus 22:21) are integral to the Judeo-Christian ethos.

Given this, the realities of the occupation — including military administration, settlement expansion, and the challenges faced by the Palestinian and Syrian civilian populations — posed stark moral challenges. Can the divine promise of land be reconciled with the often harsh realities of occupation? Does the security rationale justify the difficulties imposed on civilian populations? And how does one navigate the tension between religious

convictions about the sanctity and promise of the land and the scriptural injunctions advocating justice and compassion?

The Six-Day War and its aftermath thus not only altered the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East but also provoked deep introspection among theologians, ethicists, and scholars. The task of reconciling biblical promises with the on-ground realities of a complex and often volatile political environment remains a formidable challenge.

9. Subsequent Conflicts and the Quest for Peace

The State of Israel's establishment and its early wars laid the groundwork for a set of geopolitical realities that persistently drive conflict in the region. While the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and the Six-Day War of 1967 are often highlighted due to their profound impact on territorial boundaries and national narratives, several other significant military engagements have punctuated Israel's history. Each of these conflicts brought with them their own sets of challenges, rationales, and implications. However, as we delve into the dynamics and details of these wars, a consistent theme emerges: the difficulty of reconciling modern military and political events with biblical narratives and prophecies.

Overview of Other Significant Wars and Skirmishes:

- **The Yom Kippur War (1973):** Also known as the October War, this conflict was initiated by a surprise attack by Egypt and Syria on the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur. Intended to reclaim territories lost in the Six-Day War, this conflict saw initial Arab gains before a counter-offensive by Israel. The war eventually led to a military stalemate, but its psychological and political impacts were profound, pushing

the parties toward a recognition of the necessity for negotiation and eventual peace treaties.

- **The Lebanon Wars (1982, 2006):** The First Lebanon War in 1982 was initiated by Israel to counter the threat of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) based in southern Lebanon. The war led to the occupation of parts of Lebanon and the eventual withdrawal of Israeli forces in 2000. The Second Lebanon War in 2006 was fought between Israel and Hezbollah, a Shiite militant group. The conflict, while short-lived, resulted in significant casualties and infrastructural damage on both sides.
- **Intifadas:** The Palestinian uprisings, known as the First Intifada (1987-1993) and the Second Intifada (2000-2005), were grassroots movements against Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza. These uprisings involved a combination of civil disobedience, protests, and, particularly in the Second Intifada, acts of terrorism. They were met with significant military responses by Israel.
- **Gaza Conflicts:** Post the Israeli disengagement from Gaza in 2005, a series of conflicts arose between Israel and the ruling party in Gaza, Hamas. These included major military operations such as "Cast Lead" (2008-2009), "Pillar of Defense" (2012), and "Protective Edge" (2014). Each of these conflicts had their own dynamics but were rooted in the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with issues of security, blockade, and rocket attacks driving the hostilities.

Emphasis on the Absence of Biblical Justification for These Conflicts:

While the biblical narrative contains instances of wars and conflicts, often showcasing the Israelites' struggles against various adversaries, using these scriptures to justify modern-day military actions is a complex endeavor. The scriptures, especially the prophetic ones, predominantly highlight a vision of peaceful restoration and divine protection, not of human-initiated conflicts.

For instance, the Psalms often depict God as a refuge and protector (e.g., Psalm 46:1). The prophets, on the other hand, envisioned a time of universal peace, as described in Isaiah 2:4, "They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore." Such verses highlight a divine blueprint for peace, not perpetual conflict.

The challenge for theologians, policymakers, and believers is to differentiate between the aspirations and promises of biblical texts and the realities of contemporary geopolitical conflicts. While the return of Jews to Israel may resonate with biblical prophecies, the subsequent wars and skirmishes, driven by a myriad of political, territorial, and security concerns, find limited parallel or endorsement in the scriptures.

In conclusion, the landscape of Israel's military engagements post-1967 is intricate, shaped by regional geopolitics, existential threats, and the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Yet, throughout these tumultuous times, the quest for a sustainable peace remains paramount. Aligning this quest with biblical teachings about justice, compassion, and peace might offer pathways to reconciliation and coexistence.

10. The Palestinian Plight: A Call for Justice

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, enduring for over a century, stands as one of the most persistent and complex confrontations of modern history. At its core lies the struggle of two peoples for self-determination and sovereignty over a shared land. Yet, inextricably linked to the broader geopolitics and regional machinations, the conflict has had deeply personal ramifications for countless individuals, notably the Palestinians. Their narrative

is one of displacement, occupation, and a continuous search for justice, agency, and identity.

A Detailed Look at the Challenges Faced by Palestinians:

- **Displacement:** The Nakba ("catastrophe" in Arabic) refers to the events of 1948 when hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled or were expelled from their homes during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. These refugees and their descendants now number in the millions, many still living in refugee camps in neighboring countries, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip.
- **Occupation:** Following the Six-Day War in 1967, Israel captured and began its occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza Strip. This occupation, now spanning over five decades, has subjected Palestinians to military rule, with restrictions on movement, detentions without trial, and regular clashes with Israeli Defense Forces.
- **Settlement Expansion:** Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, considered illegal under international law, have been a significant point of contention. These settlements impede the territorial contiguity essential for a viable Palestinian state and create friction points between settlers and Palestinian residents.
- **Economic Hardships:** The occupation, combined with blockades and access restrictions, especially in Gaza, has had devastating economic impacts. High unemployment rates, limited access to resources, and dependence on international aid define the Palestinian economic landscape.
- **Violence and Insecurity:** Periodic outbreaks of violence, whether in the form of Intifadas, rocket attacks from Gaza, or Israeli military operations, have taken a heavy toll on Palestinian civilians. The omnipresence of conflict has marked entire generations with trauma and uncertainty.

The Importance of Recognizing Their Rights and Ensuring Justice:

In the midst of this complex geopolitical landscape, a foundational ethical imperative remains: the recognition and affirmation of the inherent dignity, rights, and aspirations of the Palestinian people. As noted in numerous scriptures, justice stands as a cornerstone of divine expectation. Micah 6:8 succinctly encapsulates this mandate: "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

The pursuit of justice for Palestinians entails several dimensions:

- **Self-Determination:** Recognizing the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, autonomy, and a state of their own, where they can govern themselves and determine their destiny.
- **Right of Return or Compensation:** Addressing the plight of Palestinian refugees, either through the right of return to their ancestral homes or through adequate compensation and resettlement options.
- **Ending Occupation:** Ensuring the end of the military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and dismantling or regularizing the status of settlements in line with international law and negotiated agreements.
- **Human Rights:** Upholding the human rights of Palestinians, ensuring they live free from arbitrary detentions, undue restrictions, or collective punishment.
- **Economic Development:** Supporting the socio-economic upliftment of the Palestinian territories, ensuring access to resources, trade opportunities, and development aid.

The biblical call for justice, coupled with international human rights conventions, underscores the moral and legal imperatives to address the Palestinian plight. While the road to a just

resolution is fraught with challenges, the recognition of the Palestinian narrative, rights, and aspirations remains an indelible step towards a more equitable and peaceful future.

11. The Ethical Teachings of Judaism

Judaism, among the world's oldest monotheistic religions, is replete with ethical teachings that center around justice, peace, and love for one's neighbor. These values, deeply rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures, form a moral compass that guides Jewish life and thought. Interpreted and articulated through millennia, these teachings hold profound implications for the challenges of today's Middle Eastern conflicts, particularly with regards to Israel's relationship with its Palestinian neighbors.

A Deep Dive into Jewish Values of Peace, Justice, and Love for the Neighbor:

- **Shalom (Peace):** At the heart of Jewish aspiration lies the ideal of "Shalom," often translated as "peace." However, Shalom goes beyond merely the absence of conflict. It encompasses a profound sense of completeness, wholeness, and harmony. The vision of peace is vividly painted in the Prophetic writings. For instance, Isaiah 2:4 notes, "They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore." The active pursuit of peace is a paramount Jewish duty.
- **Tzedek (Justice):** Justice stands as a central pillar of Jewish ethics. The oft-quoted verse, "Justice, justice you shall pursue" (Deuteronomy 16:20), serves as a clarion call for fairness and righteousness in all dealings. It is an injunction not merely to uphold justice but to actively seek it.

This entails the imperative to uphold the rights and dignities of all, even those perceived as adversaries.

- **Ahavat Re'a (Love for the Neighbor):** "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18) is arguably one of the most famous biblical imperatives. This mandate calls for empathy, compassion, and goodwill towards others, encompassing not just one's immediate community but all of humanity. Rabbinic teachings further elaborate this concept, highlighting the intrinsic value and sanctity of every human life.

The Responsibility to Treat All Inhabitants of the Land with Dignity:

- **Ger Toshav (Resident Alien):** The Torah frequently reminds the Israelites of their experiences as strangers in Egypt and consequently mandates kind treatment of the stranger or the resident alien. Passages such as Exodus 22:21 state, "Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt," emphasizing empathy born out of shared experience.
- **Sanctity of Life:** The Jewish tradition places a profound emphasis on the sanctity of life. The Talmudic teaching that "whoever saves a life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world" (Sanhedrin 37a) underscores the immense value placed on every individual.
- **Responsibility and Stewardship:** Jewish teachings emphasize the responsibility of stewardship over the land and its inhabitants. This entails not only taking care of the environment but ensuring justice, equity, and peace for all its residents.
- **Repentance and Rectification (Teshuva):** Central to Jewish ethos is the concept of 'Teshuva,' often translated as 'repentance.' It signifies returning to one's higher self and to God by acknowledging misdeeds, expressing remorse, and

taking tangible steps towards rectification. This concept can be seen metaphorically, signaling collective introspection and course correction in light of ethical imperatives.

In sum, the ethical teachings of Judaism, deeply interwoven with notions of peace, justice, and love, provide a robust moral framework. These principles, when genuinely engaged with, can inform and guide the ways in which the challenges of the Israeli-Palestinian relationship are approached and addressed. They offer a vision of mutual respect, dignity, and coexistence, beckoning towards a path of reconciliation and understanding.

12. Conclusion

The enduring and intricate narrative of the Israeli-Palestinian relationship is interwoven with historical, political, and religious threads that have profound implications for peace, justice, and coexistence in the region. At the heart of this narrative lies the deeply rooted belief in the divine sanction for the Jewish return to the Holy Land, a sentiment reverberating through the annals of Jewish history and scripture. Yet, as with any profound truth, it carries with it a weight of responsibility.

Reiteration of the Divine Sanction for the Jewish Return:
The scriptures are unequivocal in their portrayal of a divine promise. Verses from Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel resonate with the divine assurance of the Jewish return to their ancestral land. This return, encapsulated by themes of restoration, gathering, and divine commitment, paints a picture of a people returning to their homeland, enveloped in divine grace and mercy. This promise, deeply etched into the collective Jewish consciousness, has, over the centuries, inspired hope, resilience, and a sense of purpose.

However, the spiritual gravitas of this return, as delineated in scriptures, emphasizes peace, prosperity, and restoration. There is a marked absence of any divine decree endorsing conflict, conquest, or the marginalization of other inhabitants of the land.

A Call for Ethical Treatment of All Inhabitants of the Holy Land:

Drawing from the very scriptures that affirm the Jewish return is an equally compelling ethical imperative. The principles of "Shalom" (peace), "Tzedek" (justice), and "Ahavat Re'a" (love for the neighbor) underscore the Jewish moral compass. These teachings are not mere abstract ideals; they are actionable principles that beckon for realization in the very land deemed holy.

The plight of the Palestinian people, with its stories of displacement, occupation, and search for justice, warrants deep introspection. In the face of such challenges, the ethical teachings of Judaism ring out clearly: the duty to treat all individuals with dignity, fairness, and compassion. The Torah's recurring reminders of the Israelites' own experiences as strangers underscore the need for empathy and equitable treatment.

In the mosaic of Middle Eastern geopolitics, where divinely sanctioned promises and human actions intertwine, lies a profound challenge and an opportunity. While the divine promise of return remains unshaken, the subsequent human actions must align with the broader scriptural ethos of justice, peace, and love. The Holy Land, revered by billions across different faiths, beckons its inhabitants towards a future where every individual, irrespective of their ethnicity or faith, is treated with the dignity, respect, and love that the same scriptures enshrine.